around your woodlot

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INFORMATION AND SUGGESTED INTERVIEW TOPICS ON THE NEW BRUNSWICK CHRISTMAS TREE INDUSTRY

By:

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"Helping woodlot owners help themselves."
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Each year, there is considerable interest among the media prior to Christmas concerning the Christmas tree industry. Often, FES staff are asked to provide some background information on production methods and production levels. This note provides updated data that may be used for such purposes. For answers to marketing questions or other non-quantitative, opinion-type questions, I suggest staff refer the media to the executive of the local producer groups, as well as the vice-president or president of the New Brunswick Co-op:

CHRISTMAS TREE INDUSTRY UPDATE 1989

NEW BRUNSWICK CHRISTMAS TREE GROWERS CO-OP LTD.

President:

Louis Savoie
Sheila, NB
EOC 1ZO
Telephone: (506)395-6161

1st Vice-President

Bill Smith
Stanley, NB
EOH 1TO
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The Production Base

No. of Growers:	Approx. 1,000 including hobbyists	
Area Cultivated:	2,450 ha wildstands	6,050 ac.
	2,500 ha planted	5,175 ac.
	4,950 ha total	12,225 ac.

No. of Producer Groups: 23 local groups + 1 provincial Co-op
Major Species: Balsam Fir - 97% of production
Minor Species: Scotch Pine, White Spruce

Production Levels

Over 85% of production is exported, primarily to the United States. Lesser numbers of trees are also sent to Bermuda, Puerto Rico, Bermuda, and Central Canada.

Year	Exports To Other Countries	Graded Trees	Estimated Total Production
1955	1,147,075	--	--
1965	1,428,149	--	--
1975	172,179	--	--
1985	364,000	151,000	404,000
1986	337,000	140,000	382,000
1987	307,000	131,000	357,000
1988	327,000	117,000	387,000
1989 (estimated)	305,000	104,000	365,000

Value of the Industry (Farm gate value)

Year	Exports ($)	Unit Price ($)	Total Production ($)
1955	556,214	0.48	--
1965	1,043,729	0.73	--
1975	300,000	1.74	--
1985	2,970,000	8.15	$3.4 million
1986	3,280,000	9.72	3.7 million
1987	3,224,000	10.50	3.6 million
1988	3,500,000	10.70	4.0 million
1989 (estimated)	3,140,000	10.30	3.7 million

Trends

1. Traditionally, New Brunswick has enjoyed a strong demand for both its cultivated and bundled trees. However, due to increased planting levels over the past decade in nearly every State and most Provinces, markets are becoming more difficult to secure and maintain. Christmas tree producing regions of North America are reporting major drops in 1989 wholesale prices, and large surpluses of trees. While not immune to these trends, New Brunswick appears to be less effected than many other areas.

2. The majority of New Brunswick production (estimated 60%) still comes from wildstands. In the next few years the harvest of plantation-grown trees is likely to dominate, as plantations established over the past decade become productive.

3. Until recently, Christmas tree growers have concentrated their efforts on cultural aspects of growing trees. Due to tightening markets, growers and grower organizations are placing new emphasis on agressive marketing campaigns.

   - The New Brunswick Christmas Tree Growers Co-Operative Ltd, which represents approximately 400 independent Christmas tree growers, is working toward installing a staff member to work full-time on marketing and member/customer services.

   - The Co-Operative, as well as numerous non-affiliated growers, retailers, and brokers are joining other growers across North America to promote "Real Christmas Trees". This is an effort to prevent erosion of their market to artificial trees.

This effort will result in a U.S. 1.75 million dollar advertising campaign in late November - early December, aimed at the American market. This program will be delivered via U.S. national network TV, TV Guide inserts and other media. Willard Scott, NBC Today Show weatherman, has been hired to act as spokesman for the Real Tree Industry.

Also, currently being considered is the Real Christmas Tree's involvement in Christmas specials such as the Bob Hope Christmas Special or Mickey's Christmas Carol, and the Macey' Thanksgiving Day Parade. Both Coca-Cola and Kellog's have approached the Real Tree Industry to consider joint advertising campaigns.

4. Production of Christmas wreaths have, for several decades, supplemented the incomes of rural New Brunswickers both Christmas tree growers and non-growers alike. Balsam fir brush, which is tied into decorative aromatic Christmas wreaths, is collected from cultivated fir stands and natural forest sites alike.

Recent stimulation of the wreath industry by the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency and the Provincial Departments of Commerce & Technology, and Labour have promoted this industry to the point that, by many estimates, it contributes as much to the New Brunswick economy as Christmas trees.

At the request of the Province's Christmas Tree growers, it has been requested that no economic stimulants, such as those available to the wreath industry, be made available to Christmas Tree Growers in New Brunswick.

5. Until 1987, much of the balsam fir planting stock used by New Brunswick growers has come from the Provincial Nursery at very competitive rates. In order to compete more fairly in the U.S. Christmas tree market, to encourage private participation in the production of balsam planting stock, and to discourage overexpansion of the Province's Christmas tree industry, efforts are well underway to reduce production from the Provincial Nursery and to encourage the establishment of private nurseries. To date, this effort has been successful. Several private nurseries are now operating, and a significant number of Christmas tree growers are now self-sufficient with respect to their planting stock needs. Because of the concurrent increase in cost of purchased planting stock, (400% over 4 years in some cases) some growers are likely to reduce their traditional levels of planting.

6. Christmas tree theft has become a significant occurrence in some States. While not less common in New Brunswick, our growers are taking steps to prevent increases in such occurrances. An anti-theft program, Operation Provident, has been implemented with the cooperation of the RCMP, the NBCTGC, and the New Brunswick Forest Extension Service. Trees become inconspicuously identifiable in a manner that allows for positive identification of stolen tree, thus improving chances of securing a conviction.

<u>Markets</u>

- The U.S. market consumes over 85% of New Brunswick production, although a few thousand trees are shipped to other provinces and some Caribbean countries.

- The Provincial market for cultivated trees is estimated at 50 to 60 thousand trees annually.

- Other Canadian Christmas tree producers - Exports by other provinces:

  Nova Scotia exports 1.5 - 1.9 million trees annually
  Quebec exports 0.5 - 1.0 million annually - mainly fir
  Ontario exports - 0.1 - 0.3 million annually

- Real Tree Retail Prices Between 1977 and 1987, the average retail price in the U.S. for a real tree has increased by 42 percent. The consumer price index for the same period was up 65 percent

  A Real Tree continues to be a great holiday value with constant improvement in freshness, quality and availability at prices much lower than the general rise of the consumer price index. Nationally, 1989 retail prices should remain very close to 1988 prices.

- Synthetic vs Real Trees In New Brunswick, the majority of families celebrating Christmas do so around a real tree. While use of synthetic trees has increased slightly over the past decade, this trend is soon expected to reverse back to the natural tree as now appears to be the case in the United States.

  Returning popularity of real trees can be attributed to several factors, including:

  -Consistently improving quality of real trees.

  -Improved ability of growers to provide fresh trees to urban markets.

-Increasing consumer convenience: tree packaging, tree disposal bags, and improved tree stands.

-Increasing consumer interest in use of natural products and conservation of non-renewable resources.

In the Province of Quebec, the only Provincial jurisdiction to keep artificial/real tree fire statistics, during the ten year period 1977-86 there were only 9 fires associated with natural trees or decorations, and 23 with artificial trees or decorations. (During the same period, there were 8,591 smoking related fires in the five major Quebec urban centres alone.)

GENERAL TOPICS

These are the types of topics and points often covered in interviews. If there are any questions you do not feel prepared to answer, it is best not to offer any comment. As mentioned earlier, you may also refer journalists to producer groups or to me for a provincial overview. It would be of value to the industry if this year, staff would direct media to producers in each Region for "color" stories that will heighten public awareness of the industry and indirectly promote local sales.

If you prefer, you can request the interviewer to supply you with a list of questions in advance, thereby giving you a better opportunity to prepare for a live interview.

I trust that this information will be helpful in such efforts.

SELECTING A CHRISTMAS TREE

The whole family can have great fun in the process of choosing a tree. The preferred species of tree is often handed down, generation to generation. A few simple procedures can make the selection of a fresh, natural Christmas tree more fun and provide the best value for your money.

1. Determine where in your home you will display your tree. With this in mind, you will be able to tell what size and shape you will need.

2. Freshness is an important key when selecting your tree. The needles should be resilient. Take hold of a branch about six inches from the tip, between thumb and forefinger. Pull your hand toward yourself allowing the branch to slip through your fingers. Needles should adhere to the branch and not fall off in your hand.

3. Lift the tree a couple of inches off the ground, then bring it down abruptly on the stump end. The outer, green needles should not fall off in substantial numbers. But remember, inside needles turn brown and shed naturally every year.

4. The tree should have a fragrance and good green color.

5. A fresh tree will retain its moisture content and thereby keep its fragrance and needles if kept in a stand that has a good water holding capacity. See "Real Christmas Tree Care" tips.

CARING FOR A REAL CHRISTMAS TREE

Now that you have selected your special tree, please care for it as you would a fresh bouquet of flowers. As soon as you get it home, make a fresh straight cut across the base of the trunk. About one inch is enough. Place your tree in a water-holding stand or if you are not ready to decorate it, in a bucket of water soon after making the cut. Don't let the base of the tree dry out or a new sap seal will form and a new cut will be necessary. Keep your water stand full of water. A Christmas tree may absorb a gallon of water in the first 24 hours and several quarts a day thereafter.

A Christmas tree, like a bouquet of flowers, likes to be cool and out of drafts, so please don't put it near a fireplace, heat source, or television set.

Be sure that the light cords and connections you use on your tree are in good working order before hanging them.

Don't forget to unplug lights when you go to bed or leave home.

EXTENDED USE IDEAS

After the holidays a Christmas tree has many uses.

1. Place the Christmas tree in the garden or backyard and use it as a bird feeder. Orange slices will attract the birds and they can sit in the branches for shelter.

2. A Christmas tree is biodegradable, its branches may be removed and used as mulch in the garden. The trunk can be chopped for mulch.

3. Fir tree foliage can be stripped from the branches and snipped into small pieces for stuffing into aromatic fir needle pillows, for sofa or bedroom.

4. Sunk into fish ponds, trees make excellent refuge and feeding areas.

5. Woodworking hobbyists can make a multitude of items including buttons and candlesticks from the trunk of a recycled Christmas tree.

A new Christmas tree was planted to replace yours to ensure that you will never need to miss the joy and happiness of a Real Tree.

CHRISTMAS TREE FARMING

Originally, the family Christmas tree came from the forest; today over 90% of the Christmas trees used in North America are plantation grown.

Plantation trees are grown in cultivated stands, sheared and prepared to provide the consumer with the best possible trees.

Usually Christmas trees begin life in a nursery where superior seed is planted and grown for two to three years.

The seedlings are taken from the nursery beds and replanted in Christmas tree plantations. Many are transplanted into beds for another two or three years before going into a plantation for their final years of development.

While growing, Christmas trees provide many environmental benefits. They replenish the environment's oxygen supply, serve as wildlife habitat, increase soil stability and provide a valuable and aesthetically pleasing improvement to the land. Trees are frequently planted on abandoned land or cultivated under power lines where no other crop is practical.

Each year the young trees are shaped or pruned. By holding back rapid upward growth, the grower can encourage the tree to branch more quickly, and gradually achieve the full bushy appearance people prefer in their Christmas trees. Uneven development may be corrected by shearing or pruning.

During the 12 to 15 years a Christmas tree is growing from a seed to a well-shaped 6 - 8 foot tree, it faces many hazards. Trees can suffer from too little or too much sun or rain; destruction by rodents, insects, disease, hail or fire; being overgrown with brush and weeds or being stolen from the field by thieves.

At harvest time, wholesale growers select finished trees by placing tags on them. The tagged trees are cut, bundled and loaded on trucks or boats for the journey to any one of thousands of retail lots across the continent and beyond.

The "choose and cut farm" has helped to renew the tradition of the entire family selecting and cutting the Christmas tree. Usually a whole field is not ready for sale in any one year, but may produce saleable trees for a number of years before needing replanting for the next crop.

Providing families with the best Christmas trees that man and nature can grow is a big job. Most Christmas tree farmers agree it is a good life, provided you are willing to work year round on a crop that needs tender, loving care for many years before it can be sold.

TRADITIONS AND FOLKLORE

This year over 38 million North American families will bring a natural Christmas tree into their homes to help create a warm, friendly setting for their Christmas celebration. The tradition endures year after year ... but how did it get started?

Historians trace countless sources that evolved into our present day custom of using a Christmas tree. Legends tell of the decorated tree used in winter celebrations long before there was a Christmas.

Egyptians brought green palm branches into their homes in late December as a symbol of growing things. Romans trimmed evergreen trees with trinkets and topped them with an image of their sun god to celebrate Saturnalia. Druid sorcerers hung golden apples and lit candles on oak trees to celebrate the winter solstice. In the middle ages, the feast of Adam and Eve was held on December 24th; a fir tree hung with red apples called the Paradise tree was its symbol.

It is generally agreed, however, that the use of an evergreen tree as part of the Christian Christmas celebration started 400 years ago in Germany and spread to most of northern Europe by the 19th Century.

Hessian Mercenaries during the American Revolutionary War brought the custom to the United States.

In 1804, U.S. soldiers stationed at Fort Dearborn (now Chicago) hauled trees from surrounding woods to their barracks during Christmas.

A German named Charles Minnegerode introduced the custom of decorating trees in Williamsburg, Virginia in 1842. That tree was described as "splendidly decorated" with strings of popcorn, gilded nuts and lighted candles.

The first recorded Christmas tree retail lot was set up in 1851 by a Pennsylvanian named Mark Carr who hauled two ox sleds loaded with trees from his land in the Catskills to the sidewalks of New York.

Meanwhile, in Victorian England, Prince Albert, husband of Queen Victoria, gave the Christmas tree the stamp of acceptability in England when he introduced it into the Royal Palace.

Back in the United States, the 14th President of the United States, Franklin Pierce, was the first President to set up a Christmas tree in the White House.

But it wasn't until 1923 that President Calvin Coolidge established the National Christmas Tree Lighting Ceremony on the White House lawn that has since become part of the annual holiday observance.

The enduring tree symbol - which is even older than Christianity and not exclusive to any one religion - remains firmly established as part of our holiday customs, engaging not only our senses of sight, touch and smell, but also our sense of tradition, hope and good will.